

PHASE II SCHOOL DESIGN COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH  
TOWN COUNCIL AND BOARD OF EDUCATION  
MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2010 – 6:00 P.M.  
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

1) ROLL CALL

Present: Scott, Ritter, Shirvell, Koehler, Kane, Kolnaski  
Staff: Oefinger, Kadri, Schneider, Norris, Greenleaf, Bresnyan  
JCJ: Smolley, Celella

All Town Councilors were present except Councilor Flax who arrived at 7:00 p.m.

Mayor Streeter called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2) ITEMS OF BUSINESS

A. Presentation of Master Planning Study Phase II – Final Report to the Town Council

John Scott, Chairman of the Phase II School Design Committee, read an opening statement providing background on the Committee's membership and efforts to date. A final plan dated March 11, 2010 and prepared by JCJ Architecture was approved by the School Design Committee and submitted to the Town Council. Subsequently there was another study conducted by the Board of Education that affirms the direction of the JCJ report.

Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri noted that there was no quorum of the Board of Education.

Greg Smolley of JCJ explained that his firm has been working on the Phase II plan since early 2008. The Phase II study is designed to be a continuation of the Phase I plan that was based on the Vision Committee Report. The original focus of the Phase II study was addressing the middle schools. Mr. Smolley reviewed the conditions that existed at the beginning of the effort. The Committee looked at three different configurations: one, two and three middle schools. A number of demographic studies were conducted and the Vision Committee Report that called for a range of teaching spaces was reviewed. The Town program typically exceeds state funding guidelines, which drives design decisions later in the process. Mr. Smolley reviewed the state funding guideline that is determined by projected enrollment. The cost differential between the Town program and the state reimbursable program is smallest for a single school scenario. The optimum location for a single school is the geographic and demographic "center" of the Town, but there is a northwest/southeast split in the middle school population. Mr. Smolley reviewed the Committee's preliminary conclusion to have two middle schools.

At that time, the new superintendent was brought on board and the scope of the study was expanded. Updated enrollment projections were obtained and parameters expanded to include a pre-school option. The addition of a Pre-K option was confirmed with Groton Public Schools as

part of their long-range plan and new grade configurations were identified (Pre-K-1, 2-6, 7/8, and 9-12). JCJ developed programs for each grouping. The optimal facility program would be two Pre-K-1 schools located at S. B. Butler and West Side; four 2-6 schools located at Kolnaski, Northeast Academy, Cutler, and either Charles Barnum or Mary Morrison; and one middle school. Mr. Smolley noted that racial diversity was one criteria used in formulating the program.

JCJ developed building programs and test fits for the Pre-K-1 schools and the middle school. Mr. Smolley reviewed the test fits on the S. B. Butler, West Side, and Cutler sites. After looking at a number of sites, the Committee decided on three potential sites for a single middle school: Downes-Patterson, Merritt, and Kolnaski. Mr. Smolley reviewed the constraints associated with the first two sites and state guidelines for purchasing property. The Kolnaski site is sized for a second building and has existing infrastructure. In addition, there is room for fields and parking and the property is owned by the Town. The down side is that there would be no walkers to the school.

JCJ then looked at potential schedules predicated on getting a grant application into the state by next June, which requires that local funding be in place before that. Cost projections were developed for short and long schedules. The project development and other costs associated with Kolnaski and Northeast Academy were used as a basis for extrapolation to arrive at construction and contingency costs. Two phasing schemes are possible. The estimated cost for the Committee's preferred option is \$145 to \$176 million, or \$121 to \$136 million on the short schedule.

JCJ presented a draft plan to the Committee in December 2009. Comments were incorporated into the final plan. The Committee did discuss Claude Chester, but raised concerns with the size of the site, its location within the flight path, and the use of Poquonnock Plains Park.

Councilor O'Beirne stated he was "dazzled" by the projected costs. He asked if the Committee considered a fall back option to use existing facilities for the new grade configuration if funds are not available. Mr. Smolley indicated that it is also necessary to look at the cost of owning what is owned. Groton's per student maintenance cost is one of the highest in the state and does not reflect needed capital improvements. The existing facilities would require substantial investment just for maintenance. All indications from the state are that school construction funding will continue despite the economic downturn. The Town can move forward and step back if the state funding is withdrawn. The Pre-K and Kindergarten programs require significant building changes including fixtures. Those programs should be limited to the smallest number of facilities possible. Councilor O'Beirne noted that the Board of Education's operations budget did not go down as a result of the new schools. Mr. Smolley noted that there are still older buildings to maintain, even as the district's schools are upgraded over a number of years.

Discussion followed on reimbursement issues associated with Pre-K programs. Groton's reimbursement rate is currently 66% meaning that slightly over half of the project would be reimbursable.

Smolley addressed the review and ultimate dismissal of the Flanders Road property as a potential middle school site. Councilor Sheets asked why any properties other than Kolnaski were even considered for a middle school. Mr. Smolley noted the Board of Education's policy not to use I-95 for transportation. Looking at different sites was part of the School Design Committee's due diligence. Mr. Smolley concurs that the state may balk if the Town wants to purchase another site considering the significant investment in infrastructure at the Kolnaski site.

Councilor Flax arrived at 7:00 p.m.

Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri made introductory remarks. He described the opportunity to look at a different grade configuration during the Phase II process. Mr. Kadri suggested that the pressures on the education side are not felt on the municipal side and therefore he would be advocating strongly for the school system and the best time frame to meet educational demands.

Mr. Kadri explained that the timing of Phase II became an issue after the final JCJ report was submitted. There is a funding cliff/budget crisis coming in 2012 that will require school closures. Another consideration is anticipated large scale retirements. Now is also the time to take advantage of low borrowing and construction costs. The Board of Education wanted to go beyond the JCJ report and include a GIS based analysis and more detailed cost analysis. The McKissick Associates report recommends Claude Chester as the site for a single middle school and recommends a different configuration at S. B. Butler. Mr. Kadri noted that the recommended grade configuration is educationally sound and maximizes the community's facilities; educational specifications still need to be determined.

Mr. Kadri introduced Vern McKissick who reviewed his professional credentials. Mr. McKissick noted his study started from "scratch" and did not use any information from the JCJ report. He reviewed a PowerPoint presentation covering GIS mapping of student locations, bus stops and routes; attendance boundaries; current pupil locations; ethnicity; enrollment projections; zoning and planned residential developments; capacity; building conditions; a summary of deferred costs by building; projected enrollment by new grade groupings; a generic room schedule; attendance areas by grade groups; walking distances; minority indications by facility; site evaluations based on centroids for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students; site busing comparisons; and site analyses including identified constraints, crude test fits, and pros and cons. The preferred site was identified as Claude Chester. Mr. Kadri expressed a desire to look at Claude Chester because it is a focal point for educational and recreational opportunities within walking distance of Groton's second neediest community. Potential obstacles include traffic/transportation issues, working cooperatively with Poquonnock Plains Park, and the flight path. Mr. McKissick reviewed parking and circulation; building height; field space; flight path information; and other specifics of the proposal.

Mr. McKissick reviewed construction costs, inflation factors, and grant calculation. Financing costs are not included in the \$127 million cost estimate. He then reviewed implementation timelines and indirect costs and savings.

Mr. Kadri provided a budget overview and discussed field construction/usage. There are approximately 8 acres at Claude Chester and 12 acres at Poquonnock Plains Park.

Councilor Watson expressed concern about the use of Poquonnock Plains Park by the middle school.

Councilor O'Beirne asked if the validity of the predicted savings can be tested by analyzing Phase I savings since the claims of savings in Phase I did not materialize.

Mayor Streeter asked if the Committee is sticking by its April recommendation. Koehler stated that the consensus of the Phase II School Design Committee was to review the new information presented and come back to the Town Council with a consensus recommendation.

Mr. Smolley noted that the Claude Chester site was always on the list for review, but because a middle school would expand into adjacent areas, and given the community's concerns with the flight path and Poquonnock Plains Park, the site was not explored in great detail. The Committee did not see Claude Chester as a favorable site.

Mr. Kadri discussed the perceived risk of a plane impact versus longer bus times, and encouraging recreation versus drug involvement. He noted that the Route 1 traffic and access issues must still be explored.

Mayor Streeter noted that the Council will wait for the Phase II School Design Committee's recommendation.

Koehler explained that the Committee is very concerned with using the fields at Poquonnock Plains Parks for the middle school. Reducing the number of middle schools from three to one will limit the number of teams that students can play on so there must be an adequate number of fields. Acreage at the Claude Chester site is limited. If a middle school were located elsewhere, Claude Chester would eventually be closed and the entire site could be used for additional centrally-located fields, achieving Mr. Kadri's goal.

Councilor Peruzzotti stated that she feels Phase II should be on the November ballot and this effort should be completed with all speed.

A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Monteiro, to adjourn the Town Council portion of meeting at 9:00 p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.

The Phase II School Design Committee recessed and reconvened their meeting at 9:10 p.m.

Present: Kolnaski, Ritter, Koehler, Scott, Kane

B. Other

Discussion followed on the Town's investment in infrastructure at the Kolnaski site and the expectation that a second school would be built there. Committee members noted the number of "hoops" associated with the Claude Chester site. Smolley stated there will be significant off site costs associated with Claude Chester that are not reimbursable by the state. Schneider noted existing Route 117 drainage issues as well as drainage issues at Poquonnock Plains Park. Route 117 is also designated non-access in the area of the school. There is also a concern regarding the geometrics for bus traffic. The cost savings associated with school closings that were cited by McKissick would apply to either site. Smolley stated that he doesn't think the design for S. B. Butler complies with the Building Code. He suggested that the Committee must consider the ability of getting the referendum passed as well as social benefit.

Koehler feels that the Kolnaski site is a better option because of the ability to construct additional fields. If both Fitch Middle and Claude Chester are closed, the flight path issue goes away. Kolnaski noted that middle school children will hang out at Poquonnock Plains Park and she is concerned with the impact on Tercentennial Park during the day. Smolley suggested that the best long term use for the Claude Chester site is also a consideration. Koehler stated that busing is important but it should not be driving the decision about where to place the middle school.

Smolley suggested that the Committee acknowledge what was said in the McKissick report and build on the similarities between the two reports, but articulate the reasons for the Committee's recommendation. Pros and cons of the two sites can be discussed at the next meeting.

Oefinger stated that the Committee must address the middle school location and put forth a single cost estimate. Smolley noted there must be a cost range because of unknowns in the town program versus the state program. The program for Pre-K must be determined by the Board of Education.

The next meeting was scheduled for June 24<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

3) ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.